

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MANAGU 02347 01 OF 02 222248Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----082123 222256Z /65

R 222135Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6640
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAGUA 2347

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, CASC, SHUM, NU
SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH SOMOZA: MAY 19

SUMMARY: THE AMB MET WITH SOMOZA TO DISCUSS THE APPROVAL OF THE NUTRITION AND OTHER AID LOANS. SOMOZA CONTINUED TO INSIST THAT THE USG MORE ACTIVELY SUPPORT THE GON AND POINTEDLY REFERRED TO HIS INFLUENTIAL "FRIENDS" IN CONGRESS WHO WOULD EMBARRASS THE ADMINISTRATION IF SUCH SUPPORT WAS NOT GIVEN. THE AMB STRESSED THE NEED FOR THE CONSOLIDATION OF ANY PROGRESS TOWARD DEMOCRATIZATION AND EXPLAINED THE THREE ASPECTS OF THE USG HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY. END SUMMARY

1. AT PRESIDENT SOMOZA'S REQUEST, THE AMB MET WITH HIM FOR TWO AND ONE-HALF HOURS FOR A WORKING LUNCH ON MAY 19. AT THE ONSET, THE AMB RAISED THE CHARITON CASE (SEPTEL).

2. THE PRESIDENT AGAIN COMPLAINED THAT, DESPITE APPROVAL OF THE NUTRITION AND OTHER LOANS, THE USG WAS STILL UNWILLING TO RECOGNIZE THE IMPROVEMENT IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION IN NICARAGUA AND THAT, IN FACT, HE (SOMOZA) HAD BEEN "VERY RESPONSIVE" TO USG "DEMANDS." SOMOZA SAID THE ATTEMPT BY THE WASHINGTON POST TO MAKE CONG. WILSON

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PAGE 02 MANAGU 02347 01 OF 02 222248Z

RESPONSIBLE FOR "CHANGES" IN POLICY SIMPLY REFLECTED THE "LACK OF POLITICAL SOPHISTICATION" OF SOME MEMBERS OF THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION WHO PREFERRED TO CLAIM DEFEAT RATHER THAN ACKNOWLEDGE SOMOZA'S DEMOCRATIC INTENTIONS. THE AMB REPLIED THAT APPARENTLY VERY FEW PEOPLE WERE SATISFIED BY THE PUBLIC STATEMENTS MADE, I.E., THAT SOMOZA WAS NOT HAPPY NOR THE LOCAL OPOSITION. THE AMB SAID THAT HE THOUGHT SOMOZA SHOULD NOT COMPLAIN AS THE USG WAS APPROVING

LOANS FOR THE NEEDY. THE AMB EXPRESSED HIS HOPE THAT THE SITUATION WOULD IMPROVE AND PROGRESS WOULD BE MADE TOWARD A CONSOLIDATED DEMOCRATIZATION. AMB SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN TRYING TO INFLUENCE THE OPPOSITION TO DISCUSS AND FACILITATE THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ELECTORAL AND GN REFORMS NEEDED FOR SUCCESSFUL, PEACEFUL DEMOCRATIZATION.

3. THE AMB THEN CRITICIZED THE GON POLICY OF OPENLY CRITIZING THE USG HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY. THE AMB TOLD SOMOZA THAT HE HAD RECENTLY HEARD A PRO-GON RADIO STATION REFER TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY AS "COMMUNISTIC." THE AMB SAID THAT THIS ATTITUDE MADE IT APPEAR THAT MANY POINTS OF DIVERGENCE EXISTED BETWEEN OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS, AND THAT THE GON WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR MISCONCEPTIONS IN THIS REGARD, WHICH DID NOT HELP THE FAVORABLE IMAGE THAT SOMOZA WISHED. SOMOZA ACCEPTED THE POINT AND SAID THAT HE HOPED FOR DEMOCRATIC PROGRESS, CONTINUED GREATER RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND, THEREFORE, AN END TO CRITICISM BETWEEN THE GON AND THE USG. SOMOZA EMPHASIZED HIS VIEW THAT THE USG SHOULD RECOGNIZE THAT HE IS THE ONLY LEADER IN LATIN AMERICA WHO LIFTED THE STATE OF SIEGE AND COMMITTED HIMSELF TO DEMOCRATIC PROCESS. THE USG, HE CONTINUED, SHOULD PRAISE HIM. THE AMB REPLIED THAT HE HOPED THAT THE POSITIVE STEPS TAKEN RESULTED, NOT FROM USG URGINGS, BUT, RATHER, FROM SOMOZA'S SENSE OF PATRIOTIC DUTY AND HISTORIC RESPONSIBILITY.

4. SOMOZA EXCUSED HIMSELF TO RECEIVE A PHONE CALL AND RETURNED TO TELL THE AMB THAT THE CALL WAS FROM THE U.S. ASKING HIM (SOMOZA)
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 03 MANAGU 02347 01 OF 02 222248Z

TO CONTACT "A U.S. POLITICIAN WHO HAS THE INFLUENCE TO GET NICARAGUA OFF THE HOTSPOT IN THE U.S. SENATE." SOMOZA SAID HE KNEW LOTS OF POLITICIANS, BUT DID NOT WANT TO CONTINUE USING HIS INFLUENCE TO EMBARRASS THE ADMINISTRATION. HE SAID HE WOULD MAKE THE CALL SO THAT DEBATE IN THE SENATE WOULD BE ENDED AND THE GON WOULD WIN THE MILITARY TRAINING ISSUE. SOMOZA SAID THAT HE HAD THE VOTES FOR THE GON TO RECEIVE A FAVORABLE VOTE ON IMET ON THE SENATE FLOOR. HE WENT ON TO SAY LAST YEAR'S HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COALITION WHICH DEFENDED THE GON WAS "VERY ACTIVE" AND WOULD EMBARRASS THE ADMINISTRATION IF THE USG KEPT "PICKING" ON HIM.

5. THE AMB VOCALIZED HIS BELIEF THAT WITH CONTINUED PROGRESS, THE AID RELATIONSHIP WILL BE NORMALIZED-ALBEIT, PROBABLY, AT LOWER LEVELS THAN PREVIOUSLY. SOMOZA ACCEPTED THIS AS A WORLD-WIDE USG POLICY. THE AMB SAID THAT MILITARY AID WAS A PROBLEM AREA DUE TO PRESIDENT CARTER'S ARMS TRANSFER POLICY AND RESERVATIONS ON PROVIDING ARMS TO A COUNTRY SUFFERING THE THREAT OF CIVIL STRIFE AS OPPOSED TO FOREIGN AGGRESSION. SOMOZA REPLIED THAT HE COULD OBTAIN ARMS ELSEWHERE, BUT THAT PENDING FUNDS SHOULD BE USED TO PROVIDE "NON-LETHAL" ITEMS. THIS, HE SAID, WOULD "SETTLE THE ACCOUNT" AND END FRICTION. SOMOZA SAID HE FELT "VERY RESENTFUL" ABOUT THE USG CONTINUING TO HOLD UP ON APPROVED FUNDS ON HUMAN RIGHTS GROUNDS.

6. SOMOZA AGAIN SAID THAT USG CRITICISM WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE VIOLENCE IN NICARAGUA. THE AMB PROTESTED, REPLYING THAT THE USG NEITHER KILLED CHAMORRO NOR WAS ARMING NOR ORGANIZING THE OPPOSITION. SOMOZA AGREE THAT NO STATE OF WAR EXISTED, BUT THE USG WAS ENCOURAGING "HOTHEADS." ONLY NOW, HE CONTINUED, WAS THE OPPOSITIONING STARTING TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE USG WOULD NOT OUST HIM. HE SAID THAT THE USG-GON RELATIONSHIP WAS FORMERLY SO CLOSE THAT OUR POLICY CHANGE WAS EXTREMELY UNSETTLING. HE ADDED THAT IT WAS A "MIRACLE" HE HADN'T BEEN OVERTHROWN. AMB STRESSED THAT HE HAD COUNSELED MODERATION ON ALL THE FACTIONS THAT HAD VISITED HIM.

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PAGE 01 MANAGU 02347 02 OF 02 222307Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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R 222135Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6641
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 MANAGUA 2347

EXDIS

7. SOMOZA SAID THAT HE HAD TALKED WITH AN IMPORTANT CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADER WHO WANTED THE FACT OF HIS MEETING KEPT SECRET OUT OF FEAR OF THE SANDINISTAS. THEY HAD AGREED THAT THEY WOULD EACH SELECT SEVERAL LAWYERS TO MEET AND NEGOTIATE CHANGES TO THE ELECTORAL REFORMS. SOMOZA WOULD THEN TAKE THESE SUGGESTIONS INTO ACCOUNT BEFORE RETURNING THE ELECTORAL LAW TO CONGRESS. THE AMB EXPRESSED PLEASURE THAT A FORM OF DIALOG WAS UNDERWAY - EVEN IF SECRETLY - BUT EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THIS CONSERVATIVE FACTION MIGHT NOT MAINTAIN SUFFICIENT CONTACT WITH OTHER OPPOSITION LEADERS TO PERMIT LEGISLATIVE REFORM TO RECEIVE SUFFICIENT OPPOSITION SUPPORT. SOMOZA SAID HE HOPED THE CONSERVATIVES WERE MAINTAINING CONTACTS WITH OTHER OPPOSITION LEADERS, AND HE UNDERSTOOD THEY COULD NO LONGER MAKE PUBLIC PACTS, BUT RATHER, REACH "PRIVATE UNDERSTANDINGS."

8. THE AMB ASKED IF SOMOZA HAD SEEN THE RECENT PACT REUNITING TWO FACTIONS OF THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY IN WHICH THEY DID NOT OPPOSE

DIALOG. SOMOZA REPLIED THAT HE WAS UNAWARE OF THIS. (HE SAID HE IS NOT READING LA PRENSA.) HE EXPRESSED HIS INTERESTS IN THE REUNIFICATION DEVELOPMENTS OF THE PCN. HE SAID THE PCN NEEDED A CONVENTION TO PRODUCE NEW, UNIFIED LEADERSHIP AND HE WELCOMED THIS. THE AMB REPLIED THAT HE WAS PLEASED TO KNOW THAT BECAUSE THERE WAS A
SECRET

SECRET

PAGE 02 MANAGU 02347 02 OF 02 222307Z

NEED TO CREATE A CORE OF DEMOCRATIC FORCES TO COMPETE AND GARBAIN THROUGH A PEACEFUL CIVIC PROCESS.

9. THE AMB EXPRESSED HIS CONCERN OVER THE BAVINIC (NICARAGUAN HOUSING BANK) SCANDAL. (NOTE: THE SCANDAL INVOLVED ALLEGATIONS OF CORRUPTION IN THE BUILDING AND DISTRIBUTING OF HOUSING FOR THE POOR, AND LOANS TO MORE AFFLUENT CITIZENS. SHORTAGES AND LACK OF REPAYMENTS, INCLUDING MIDDLE-CLASS BORROWERS, HAVE BEEN ALLEGED. END NOTE.) SOMOZA REPLIED THAT HE UNDERSTOOD, AND THAT BAVINIC WAS A PROBLEM OF POOR MANAGEMENT. A POLITICAL DECISION HAD BEEN MADE TO GIVE HOUSING TO THE POOR, EVEN IF THEY DID NOT REPAY THE MORTGAGES, TO AVOID REVOLUTION. THE AMB REPLIED THAT THIS WAS A PROBLEM IN MANY LATIN COUNTRIES, BUT THAT SHORTAGES HAD RESULTED IN THE "LAS AMERICAS" ACCOUNT. SOMOZA SAID THAT HE FELT THE CORRUPTION HAD MAAINLY

BEEN IN MIDDLE-CLASS HOUSING, BUT THAT THE NEW BAVINIC HEAD WOULD RECTIFY THE SITUATION.

10. SOMOZA EXPRESSED HIS INTEREST IN NORMALIZING RELATIONSHIPS AND BECOMING "FRIENDLY" AGAIN. THE USG SHOULD HELP HIM "DEFUSE REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST FORCES." HE VOCALIZED HIS CONCERN OVER ANY FUTURE CHANGE IN GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP HERE, FEELING THAT THE OPPOSITION WOULD "SCREW" HIM IF IT TOOK OVER.

11. IN AN ASIDE, SOMOZA SAID THAT THE USG MUST BE CAREFUL IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC BECAUSE THE HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY COULD BE REDICULED OR FAIL THERE. THE AMB STATED HIS AMAZEMENT THAT BALAGUER, WHO WAS OLD, SICK AND NEARLY BLIND, STILL RAN FOR OFFICE. SOMOZA SAID THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THAT BALAGUER'S FOLLOWERS DIDN'T WANT TO RELINQUISH POWER AND "BY GOD, THEY WON'T."

12. SOMOZA ASKED THE AMB TO COMMENT ON CRITICISM ON PAT DERRIAN DURING THE COM MEETING IN D.C. IN MARCH. THE AMB EXPLAINED THE THREE DI-
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SECRET

PAGE 03 MANAGU 02347 02 OF 02 222307Z

MENSIONS OF THE USG HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY AND SAID THAT DIFFERENT PEOPLE EMPHASIZED DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF THE POLICY. MODERATES EMPHASIZE THE PROBLEM OF VIOLATION OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS; ACTIVISTS INCLUDE THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS WHICH ARE ULTIMATELY TIED TO FUTURE

CHANGES IN GOVERNMENTS. SOMOZA AGREED THAT "RADICALS WANT EVERYTHING IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS PACKAGE; MODERATES LESS." THE AMB SAID THAT IN LARGE ORGANIZATIONS LIKE THE DEPARTMENT AND CONGRESS, DIFFERENCES BETWEEN OFFICIALS NATURALLY OCCURRED. THE AMB STRESSED HIS BELIEF THAT TENSION OVER HUMAN RIGHTS WOULD CONTINUE IN THE FUTURE BECAUSE EVEN DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES RECEIVING AID RESENTED THE REPORTS THE DEPARTMENT HAD TO MAKE TO CONGRESS BECAUSE IT MADE THE USG APPEAR TO MONOPOLIZE MORALITY. THIS, THE AMB FINISHED, WAS AN AREA OF GREAT CONTENTION. SOMOZA BLAMED SOME LIBERALS FOR THIS LEGISLATION, BUT RECOGNIZED THAT IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT TO CHANGE THE LEGISLATION NOW.

13. COMMENT: SOMOZA APPEARS TO BE SEEKING AS MUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE ON A WIDE VARIETY OF TOPICS. SOMOZA CONTINUES TO TRY TO PROJECT STRENGTH AND CONFIDENCE BUT CLEARLY STILL IS CONCERNED ABOUT HIS POSSIBLE LOSS OF CONTROL (E.G. HIS STATEMENT THAT IT HAD BEEN A "MIRACLE" THAT HE HAD SURVIVED THE PRESSURE OF THE PAST MONTHS). AS FOR SOMOZA'S STATEMENT THAT THE OPPOSITION SHOULD REACH "PRIVATE UNDERSTANDING," WHEN ONE RECALLS THE PAST RECORD OF SOMOZA "CONTINUISMO" AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL WEAKNESSES OF THE OPPOSITION, IT IS EASY TO UNDERSTAND WHY THE FACTIONALIZED OPPOSITION IS UNCOMFORTABLE WITH ANY FORM OF PUBLIC OR PRIVATE PACT. IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT SOMOZA IS TRYING TO BRING THE OPPOSITION INTO THE PROCESS OF CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM TO OPEN UP THE ELECTORAL PROCESS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HUMAN RIGHTS, VOTING, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, FOREIGN ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS, UPPER HOUSE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 22 may 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MANAGU02347
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
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Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2617372
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CONVERSATION WITH SOMOZA: MAY 19 SUMMARY: THE AMB MET WITH SOMOZA TO DISCUSS THE APPROVAL OF THE NUTRITION AND OTHER AID LOANS. SOMOZA CONTINUED TO I
TAGS: PINS, PINT, CASC, SHUM, EAID, NU, US, (SAMOZA DEBAYLE, ANASTASIO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/2bbb8a99-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014